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RICHARD WILSON—THE LANDSCAPE PAINTER.

THE story of a man of genius is always interesting ; but, alas ! it too often happens that the story is of a melancholy character ; that its hero is seen battling hard with circumstances for a bare subsistence—denied bread in the present, and given a stone in the future. Building the sepulchres of the prophets dead, and rejecting the prophets that are among us, is an old offence. As the remembrance of the man fades away, the character of his works rises in public estimation. The life of Richard Wilson presents us with an instance.

He was born in the year 1713. His father was a clergyman in Montgomeryshire, whose family was of old standing ; and

ing on the back of a prohibited design, " Done by Joshua out of pure idleness." The copybooks of Gainsborough were filled with pencillings of flowers and trees. Benjamin West, in the far-off Quaker settlement, gave proof of extraordinary power ; and Barry, employed in his boyhood by an Irish skipper, was sent away for incorrigible laziness, in sketching on the vessel's deck great ships tempest-tossed, and uncouth, shaggy, bearded heads.

In Wilson's case, however, no attempt was made to repress the propensity for design ; every encouragement which could be afforded was given, and the child still sketched trees,



RICHARD WILSON. FROM A PORTRAIT BY RAPHAEL MENGES. ENGRAVED BY H. LINTON.

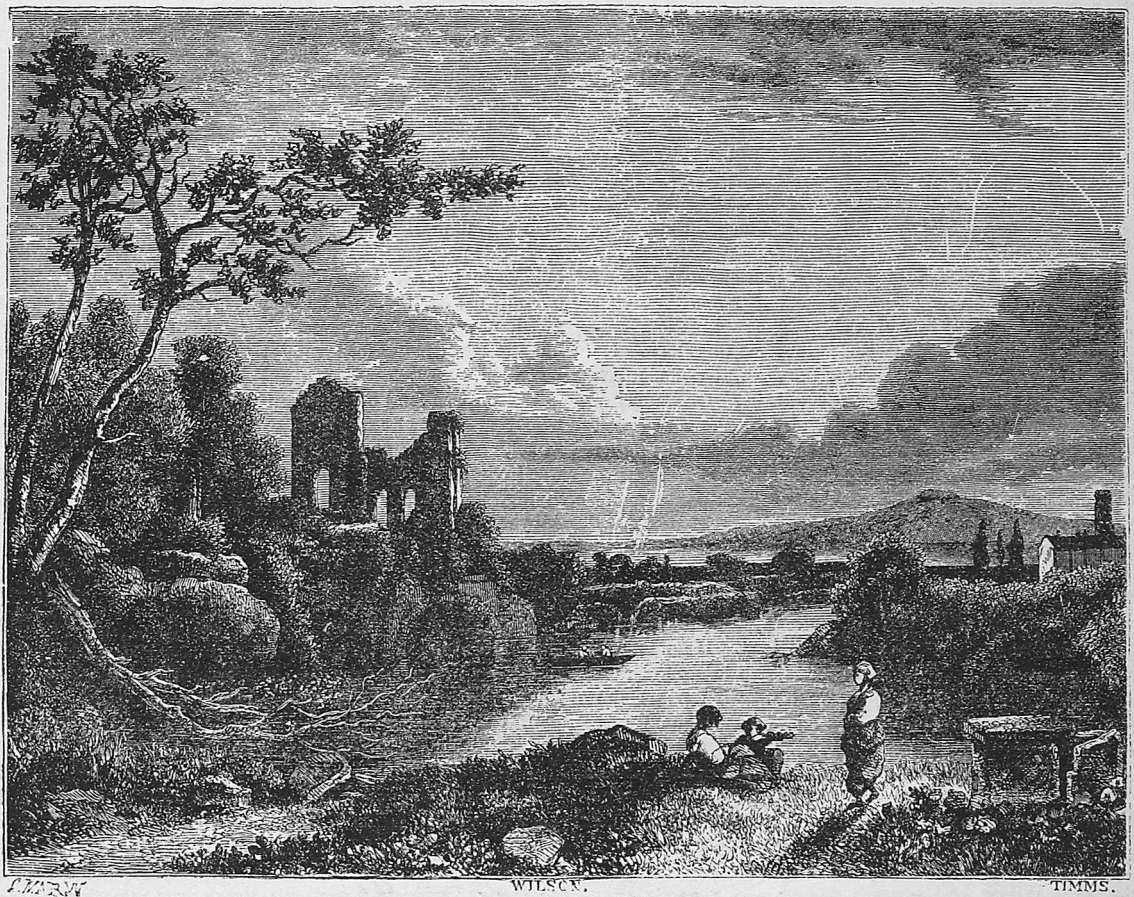
his mother was one of the Wynns, of Lecswoold. At an early age he began to exhibit a taste for drawing, and his first rude sketches were made with a burnt stick upon the walls of the house. This early indication of his genius he shared in common with many others who afterwards became great artists. Hogarth says that his exercises at school were more remarkable for the ornaments which adorned them than for the exercises themselves. The same predilection was evidenced in Reynolds, so that his father rebuked this inclination for making private drawings instead of public exercises, by writ-

animals, houses, men. How long this went on is uncertain, or how the young draughtsman managed to secure the patronage of his relation, Sir George Wynn, under whose care he quitted his old home, and set out for London. There he was placed under the instruction of a portrait painter named Wright—a man whose genius, if he had any, was lost in obscurity.

His progress under such a master could be but little, and we soon find him settled down into a commonplace portrait painter, struggling with hundreds of others for the orders of

those who sought their aid. They say his portraits exhibited no peculiar excellence, Edwards, indeed, asserts, that in drawing a head he was not excelled by any of the portrait painters of his time—that his treatment was bold and masterly, and his colouring in the style of Rembrandt; but Edwards stands alone as to this matter. In 1748 he was employed to paint a picture of the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York, for their tutor the Bishop of Norwich. Wilson was then five-and-thirty years old, and the following year he was enabled by his own savings and the help of his friends to go to Italy; there he continued his practice of portrait painting—greatly improving in his style—his talents procuring him notice, and his company being courted by men of sense and rank. A fair way of success, of opulence, and fame, was opening before him; but a simple incident turned the whole purpose of his life.

but little practised—of copying the pictures of the old masters, with the hope of catching a corresponding inspiration; but he studied their works, and mastered their methods of attaining excellence, and compared them carefully with nature. By this means he caught the tone and character of Italian scenery, and steeped his spirit in its splendour. His landscapes are fanned with the pure air, warmed with the glowing suns, filled with the ruined temples, and sparkling with the wooded streams and tranquil lakes of that classic region. His reputation rose so fast that he obtained pupils. Mengs, out of regard for his genius, painted his portrait; and Wilson repaid this flattery with a fine landscape." Vernet, the French artist, used to say, when any of his own productions were admired or purchased by the English: "Don't talk of my landscapes alone, when your own countryman, Wilson, paints so beautifully."



MORNING. FROM A PAINTING BY WILSON.

Having waited one morning, till he grew weary, for the coming of Zucarelli, the artist, he, to pass the time, employed himself in painting the scene upon which the window of his friend looked; this being performed with a considerable share of force and skill, attracted the attention of Zucarelli, who was so pleased with it that he strenuously advised the artist to follow that line only, as being more congenial to his powers, and therefore most likely to obtain for him fame as well as profit. This flattering encomium, from a painter of established reputation, had its effect; and Wilson from that time exchanged portraiture for landscape, which he pursued with vigour and success. To this circumstance is owing the splendour diffused by his genius, not only over his native country, but even over Italy itself, whose scenes have been the frequent subject of his pencil. "Wilson," says Allan Cunningham, "did not proceed upon the plan of study—much recommended

After being six years abroad, Wilson returned to England, and took up his residence in Covent-garden, London, and very soon got into the society of all the distinguished men of that day. Two pictures which he produced soon after his arrival confirmed the reputation which he had already acquired in Italy—Niobe, and a View of Rome. The Duke of Cumberland bought the former, and the Marquis of Tavistock the latter, but the prices have not been recorded. He assisted in the formation of the Royal Academy, and on the death of Hayman obtained the place of librarian. The emoluments were small, but his poverty rendered it necessary, as the taste for landscape painting was yet by no means general in England. English art had received a heavy blow and great discouragement from the Reformation. This great revolution, so full of blessings and advantages in other respects, was the cause of one great evil, the utter repudiation of all ornament

and decoration in places devoted to public worship. The love of the Roman Catholic church for gorgeous decoration had been, during the middle ages, when all other species of cultivation existed only in distorted forms, the nurse of art. Under its fostering hand the greatest painters and sculptors the world has ever seen rose into fame. They drew their inspiration from its doctrines and festivities, and they were rewarded by its munificence. The Holy Family, the Adoration of the Magi, the Annunciation, the Assumption of the Virgin, the Flight into Egypt, the Transfiguration, and the Crucifixion, are all subjects upon which the great masters have lavished all the resources of their art.

But the very fact that the Roman Catholic church delighted in these representations of great events in the history of a faith, on the great principles of which all were agreed, was sufficient to make good Protestants look upon painting itself with suspicion and dislike. Under the Stuarts the arts began to flourish again in England, but when the Puritans triumphed in 1640 painting was set down as a device of the devil, and all love for luxury, ornament, or forms of beauty considered as so many evidences of an unregenerate state. Paintings, whether on canvas or glass, were destroyed, not only without scruple, but with as hearty a good will as if they had been unclean idols, whose presence polluted the sanctuary. The Restoration again procured protection for the arts, but it could not wholly revive them. The degenerate nobility, who wrangled about party cries, intrigued, gambled, and talked scandal during the reigns of Anne and the two first Georges, had little taste for anything that did not gratify their personal vanity. Hence, portrait painting, stiff and lifeless though it was, brought many a man fame and fortune for a long series of years. About the year 1780, it was the only way in which an artist could make a livelihood. Reynolds brought it to perfection, but to Wilson's lot it fell to create and foster a taste for the faithful delineations of the great scenes of nature—the shifting panorama of the clouds, the gorgeous hues of the sky at the rising and setting of the sun, the thousand tints that clothe the fields and vary in their beauty with every change of the seasons, the rugged grandeur of the mountain, and the solemn peace of the valley.

But it spread very slowly—so slowly, that after the sale of a few of his works amongst the most distinguished amateurs, he could find no market for his works, and pictures of unrivalled beauty were exhibited day after day before the eyes of his countrymen, and passed by unnoticed. He was not able even to procure a decent livelihood, while second-rate portrait painters were revelling in wealth. "To paint the varied aspect of inanimate nature," as Allan Cunningham well remarks,—"to clothe the pastoral hills with flocks, to give wild fowl to the lakes, ringdoves to the woods, blossoms to the trees, verdure to the earth, and sunshine to the sky, is to paint landscape: it is true; but it is to paint it like a district surveyor, instead of grouping its picturesque beauties, and inspiring them with what the skilful in art call the sentiment of the scene. Wilson had a poet's feeling and a poet's eye, selected his scenes with judgment, and spread them out in beauty, and in all the fresh luxury of nature. He did for landscape what Reynolds did for faces—with equal genius, but far different fortune. A fine scene, rendered still more lovely by the pencil of the artist, did not reward its flatterer with any of its productions, either of coin, or oil, or cattle; as Kneller found dead men indifferent paymasters—so inanimate nature proved but a cold patroness to Wilson." The talent of Wilson did not secure him that encouragement and distinction which his abilities deserved. He was doomed to encounter the galling indifference of a tasteless public, which it is said was aggravated by the jealousy and intrigues of some of the most distinguished of his contemporaries, with whom he did not live on very amicable terms. This neglect might in some measure result from his own conduct, for his imprudence must be confessed; and though a man of strong sense, and superior education to most of the artists of his time, he certainly did not possess their suavity of manners. While the beautiful landscapes of Wilson were totally unappreciated,

the demand for Barrett's pictures was so great that he was realising more than £2,000 a year, and the equally weak landscapes of Smith, of Chichester, were of high value in the market. By this capricious ignorance of those who could have aided him, he was reduced to very great indigence, and his chief resource was the sordid liberality of pawn-brokers, to whom he consigned some of his finest pictures immediately upon their completion. All the world seemed leagued against him; a person who purchased many pictures from him, when urged by the unhappy artist to buy another, took him into his shop garret, and pointing to a pile of landscapes, said, "Why, look ye, Dick, you know I wish to oblige, but see! there are all the pictures I have paid you for these three years." Disappointed on every hand, our landscape painter became still more coarse and repulsive in his manners; he could now no longer flaunt in his gay attire, "in a green waistcoat ornamented with gold lace," in which he used to attend the academy in St. Martin's-lane. It is said he painted his Ceyx and Alcyone for a pot of beer and the remains of a Stilton cheese! He grew peevish, his language assumed a tone of ascerbity which ill suited his warm and benevolent heart—his mind became as squalid as his dress.

The coarseness of his manners and the meanness of his appearance gave offence to Reynolds, who was always his enemy, and never lost an opportunity, even after his death, of indulging in a sneer at his works. Upon one occasion, at a social meeting of the members of the Royal Academy, Reynolds proposed the health of Gainsborough, as "the best landscape painter." Wilson added aloud, "and the best portrait painter too." The courtly president instantly apologised, and pretended he was not aware of Wilson's presence; but the latter never forgave him the insult, if insult it could be called.

Wilson was fond of the company of Sir William Beechey, at whose residence he frequently reposed from the cares of the world, and the persecutions of fortune. The first time that he was invited to dine with Beechey, he replied to the request by saying, "You have daughters, Mr. Beechey, do they draw? All young ladies draw now." "No, sir," answered his prudent entertainer, "my daughters are musical." He was pleased to hear this, and accepted the invitation. Beechey called on him one day, and found him at work; he seized his visitor hastily by the arm, hurried him to the remotest corner of the room, and said, "There, look at my landscape; this is where you should view a painting, if you want to examine it with your eyes, and not with your nose." He was then an old man, and painted somewhat coarsely, but the effect was wonderful.

His favourite drinks were ale or porter, and many said he was too fond of them. Zoffani, in his satiric picture of the Royal Academy, painted Wilson with a pot of porter beside him. The latter instantly procured a stout stick, and declared his intention of giving the caricaturist a sound thrashing; but the latter prudently passed his brush over the offensive part, and so escaped the castigation. He was a modest man in his conversation, but had a high sense of his powers, and had a great man's prescience of the growth of his fame. "Beechey," he said, on one occasion, "you will have to see great prices given for my pictures, when those of Barrett will not fetch one farthing." The truth of this has been confirmed by time.

As he grew older, he became still more depressed in circumstances—his fine house was resigned for one much inferior, the inferior for a still worse, the fashionable street was given up for one thoroughly obscure, till at last he took a lodging in Tottenham-court-road, "where," says one of his biographers, "an easel and a brush—a chair and a table—a hard bed with a few clothes—a scanty meal, and the favourite pot of porter, were all that he could call his own." In this place he was visited by a lady of rank, who was brought to Wilson by a young student of the Academy. She commissioned the painter to execute two pictures, fixed the prices, and drove away, but Wilson detained the young man, saying "Your

kindness is in vain, I am wholly destitute, I cannot even purchase proper canvas and colours for these paintings." The young man gave him twenty pounds, then went home and said to himself, "When Wilson with all his genius starves, what will become of me?" He laid palette and pencils aside, pursued his studies at college, and rose high in the church.

The infirmities of old age were coming fast upon Wilson his sight failed, his skill of touch forsook him, he was sinking lower day by day, when a small estate became his by the death of a brother, and a profitable vein of lead had been discovered in the ground—it rescued him from a pauper's death—it relieved London from witnessing the melancholy close of his life. He took an affectionate farewell of Sir William Beechey, and set out for his native place. He arrived safely in Denbighshire, and took up his abode with a relation. There, amid verdant lawns, wide-stretching fields, old romantic woods—working little and walking much—the old man passed his few remaining days. One day he was absent longer than usual; a favourite dog which had accompanied him returned alone, howling and manifesting every sign of uneasiness, pulling at the clothes of the servants, and finally succeeded in bringing them to the aid of his master, who had sunk down and found himself unable to rise. He was carried home, but never fairly recovered from the shock. He complained of weariness

and pain, refused nourishment, and died in May, 1782, in the 69th year of his age.

The names of a few of Wilson's principal compositions will show the historical and poetical influence under which he wrought:—The Death of Niobe; Phaëton; Morning; View of Rome; Villa of Macænas, at Tivoli; Celadon and Amelia; View on the river Po; Apollo and the Seasons; Meleager and Atalanta; Cicero at his Villa; Lake of Narni; View on the Coast of Baiæ; the Tiber near Rome; Temple of Bacchus; Adrian's Villa; Bridge of Rimini; Rosamond's Pond; Llangollen Bridge; Castle of Dinas Bran; Temple of Venus at Baiæ; Tomb of Horatii and Curatii; Broken Bridge of Narni, and Nymphs Bathing.

Of the style of Wilson it may be sufficient to observe, that it formed an epoch in English landscape painting, being equalled by none before, and perhaps not surpassed by any who have followed in the same line. Fuseli says: "Wilson's taste was so exquisite, and his eye so chaste, that whatever came from his easel bore the stamp of elegance and truth. The subjects he chose were such as did credit to his judgment; they were the selections of taste; and whether of the simple, the elegant, or the sublime, they were treated with an equal felicity. Indeed, he possessed that versatility of power, as to be one minute an eagle sweeping the heavens, and the next a wren twittering a simple note on the humble thorn."

AMERICAN ANTIQUITIES AT THE LOUVRE.

IF, a century after the conquest of Mexico and Peru, any archæologists had been found to take as lively an interest in American antiquities as Boturini Benaduci did;* and if any *virtuosi*, forgetting, for a moment, the *chefs-d'œuvre* of Rome and Athens, had devoted themselves, as did the Italian traveller, to the study of the somewhat barbarous arts, it is true, of the *Aztecas*, there might have been collected, even a hundred and fifty years ago, a number of statues, of paintings, and relics of innumerable idols, or even of symbolical books, which the great zeal of the pious Zummaraga, the first bishop of Mexico, had done all he could to destroy. Had such been the case, the small body of learned men who direct their attention in the nineteenth century to the antiquities of Anahuac and of Tihuanco, would not be compelled to remain satisfied with mere conjectures, as they are at present; it is, therefore, very praiseworthy of the directors of the museum at the Louvre to have prepared an asylum for those remains, often much dilapidated, and those fragments, often very roughly formed, which constitute the new collection. It must be owned, however, that the assemblage of these things, though it confers a real benefit on science, does not give us any very clear notions of the barbarous, yet often grand, art which struck the companions of Pizarro and Cortes with astonishment. Even the conqueror of Mexico, though well versed in the relics of antiquity, could not help participating in the admiration which this art still gave rise to in the sixteenth century.

* Lorenzo Boturini Benaduci was born of an old family in Milan, and went, in 1733, to New Spain. It was the Countess of Santillane, a descendant of Montezuma, who sent him to Mexico, to look after her affairs there. While engaged in the discharge of his duties, the Italian archæologist made the most incredible researches, in order to collect Azteck antiquities, learned the language of the Indians, and did not return to Europe before he had spent eight years in his scientific labours. It would take too much time to relate here how Boturini's collections were despoiled, how he himself was thrown into prison, and how he, at last, obtained complete redress, without, however, obtaining re-possession of his treasures. Being appointed historiographer-general of the Indies, he spent the rest of his life at Madrid, where he finished the first volume of his *General History of North America*, which has never been published. He died about 1749. His book entitled *Idea de una nueva historia general de la America septentrional*, is much sought after. It is a valuable catalogue of the antiquities he had succeeded in collecting together.

There were three distinct centres of civilisation in the New World: that is, three regions where the rudimentary art of sculpture was held in great veneration. Peru, Mexico, and the table-land of Cundinamarca are worthy, in this respect, of being examined successively. In consequence of their theocratical government and of their isolated position with respect to one another, each of these countries possessed an art that was peculiarly its own. Unfortunately, the new museum, which occupies one of the smallest chambers in the Louvre, does not contain any of the valuable antiquities of New Granada, but of which Monsieur Jomard, one of the stars of science, has succeeded in collecting some of the finest specimens. The directors, who have already made such praiseworthy exertions, will, doubtless, soon take measures to supply this want. As for ourselves, passing over, for the present, the art of the Muisecas and that of the Peruvians, we will begin at once with that of the Mexicans, as being the most curious and perhaps the most varied.

Art among the Azteck nations was, above all, *hieratic*, that is, it assumed its fantastic and often monstrous forms under the direction of priests practising a barbarous kind of worship. It would, however, be an error to imagine that the statuary of Tezuczo and Tenotchtitlan confined themselves to the reproduction of the truly hideous idols which the symbolism of Mexican theogony imposed on the statuary employed in the temples. We learn from the best authority, that Mexican art, devoting itself in a more direct manner to the study of nature, perpetuated by sculpture the likenesses of the sovereigns and great men of the country. Statues representing Netzahualtooyotl, the Solomon of Anahuac, had been executed over and over again, and the chronicles tell us that the statue of Montezuma ornamented the beginning of the famous aqueduct which emptied its limpid water into the gardens of the imperial palace, which were themselves ornamented by the hand of the sculptor. The architects of Netzahualpillintli executed a colossal head of this sovereign on a gigantic body of *amistli* or of *cougard*, and every one hastened to admire this wonderful work, which was placed on the side of a mountain covered with large gardens. When Ixtliochitl, one of the last independent chiefs of Mexico, accompanied Cortes in his memorable voyage towards the Pacific Ocean, he was followed by innumerable Indians, and foreseeing, perhaps, the melancholy fate reserved